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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 000372

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#)

SUBJECT: PM MELES PUSHES FOR UNITED STATES TO PREVENT  
GENERALIZED CONFLICT IN SUDAN

Classified By: Classified by CDA John Yates for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

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[¶1.](#) (C) During a February 1 meeting with U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan Gration, Prime Minister Meles emphasized the importance of beginning post-2011 negotiations and convincing the Government of Sudan to accept the outcome of the referendum. He believed that an unsuccessful referendum could spawn generalized conflict across Sudan, and so the Darfur peace process must be sped up to reach agreement. In negotiating post-2011 issues, Meles said IGAD would support Mbeki's role on behalf of the AU, but that the United States must play a key role. Meles said that the United States had uniquely powerful influence in Sudan, but warned that internal divisions in the US Administration threatened to diminish its stature. End Summary.

[¶2.](#) (SBU) U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan General J. Scott Gration traveled to Addis Ababa from January 27-February 2, 2010 to attend the AU Summit with the U.S. delegation.

Referendum is More Critical than Elections

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[¶3.](#) (C) Meles began by prioritizing the referendum over elections as the most critical issue for the future of Sudan. He believed the elections, while important, are not the definitive act of democratic transformation. The Government of Sudan, Meles said, believes it can win the elections fairly, and so they appear to have a stake in making the elections fair and transparent. The Government of Sudan also expects "serious dividends" out of the elections, such as easing the strains created by the Darfuri rebels and the International Criminal Court indictment against Sudanese President Omar el-Bashir.

[¶4.](#) (C) Still, Meles argued, the referendum is more critical than elections. Going forward, the post-referendum plan must be negotiated and the Government of Sudan must be convinced that separation is not only an option, but the most likely one. In the likely event of separation, Meles believed there was a 90 percent chance the South would become a failed state.

[¶5.](#) (C) Meles said he raised his concerns during the AU Summit with the Government of Sudan and President Bashir,

saying that the Government should work through post-2011 issues in advance and allow for the possibility of separation. Meles questioned Basher's sincerity, but reported that the Sudanese President stated that he preferred unity, but would accept separation.

#### Referendum Could Spawn Generalized Conflict Across Sudan; Speed up Darfur Peace Process

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¶6. (C) Meles warned that if the South explodes after the referendum, Darfur would follow. To prevent the referendum from spawning "generalized conflict" across Sudan, Meles said it is incumbent to address issues in Darfur now. He believed the 15 January 2010 agreement between Chad and Sudan represented a fundamental change in attitude, but that the agreement may not hold. Chad, Meles said, may not want to "bank on an agreement" and may "hedge its bets", which could be interpreted as hesitation in Khartoum, and the agreement could fall apart. To increase the likelihood that the agreement will succeed, Meles believed that Chad needed reassurances that the United States and others would handle whatever "regional consequences they fear" and primarily with Libya.

¶7. (C) On the Darfur peace process, Meles said that negotiations were hindered by inefficiencies that made it slow to reach agreements. To increase the efficiency of the process, Meles believed that (a) the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) must recognize that the 15 January Chad-Sudan agreement as a game changer and (b) "declare Doha a tremendous success, close it down, make it a sideshow if

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necessary," relocate talks to Darfur, and assign a deadline. Meles believed that moving the Darfur peace process to Darfur proper would help "clear the deck" and "get fingers out of the pie" by cutting out the meddling of the Qataris, Egyptians, and other regional players-meddling which Meles believe occurred because the United States was absent. The Government of Sudan, he said, was not enthusiastic about holding talks in Qatar in the first place, but allowed them because they did not want to offend the Emir and because they thought the Qataris could influence JEM to be flexible. He believed the if the United States could get the Europeans on board with the idea of relocating talks, then the Africans would also be on board, and the peace process could move more quickly.

#### Post-2011 Talks: Mbeki to Lead, IGAD Takes Back Seat

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¶8. (C) Though both North and South say they are ready to negotiate post-2011 issues such as borders and citizenship rights, Meles said that "nobody would call their bluff or hold their feet to the fire." Therefore, he believed it was critical to get the parties to sit down and test their will to negotiate.

¶9. (C) On the role of IGAD in negotiating post-2011 discussions, Meles believed that IGAD needed to be involved, but that Mbeki could play the lead role on behalf of the AU and IGAD. He warned that unless the parties in Sudan know Mbeki has the backing of the United States, Mbeki would not make much headway. Discussing the background of AU and IGAD involvement in post-2011 negotiations, Meles said, was looking to have a say in the process and that IGAD, enshrined in the CPA, was simultaneously staking its claim. Despite some jockeying between the AU and IGAD, Meles said that "now it's no longer a game. It's serious: it's about making peace." He concluded that if the AU and Mbeki were present in negotiations, IGAD would take a back seat, but that the United States could not be absent.

#### US Holds Key Chips, but Internal USG Divisions Could Diminish Influence

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¶10. (C) Meles believed the United States would play a

critical role in these negotiations. He said both North and South are pragmatic and respect power, which they see in the United States and not elsewhere. For Khartoum, Meles argued, "the United States is the party to the conflict; the South is a sideshow." He explained that the real issue for the North is not just oil, but the haranguing of the United States about the South and Darfur. Meles concluded that the United States holds the key chips with Khartoum, but that it cannot successfully negotiate with the Government of Sudan without including the possibility of "getting the United States off their back," which Khartoum knows will not happen unless Darfur is also resolved.

¶11. (C) Meles said that the United States is being asked to step in so that Sudan has a real chance of avoiding catastrophe. He emphasized that while African countries are not concerned that the United States will impose solutions, it should "back home-grown solutions with full force," including the AU High-Level Panel's report on Sudan, and play a quiet, but active role behind the scenes.

¶12. (C) At the conclusion of the meeting, Meles warned that internal divisions in Washington threatened to diminish US influence, and "the United States would be bit players like everyone else." Africans, he said, do not understand the full power of Congress, but worry about the unity of the executive branch. If they see that the Administration is behind the strategy and that "both feet of the United States are in the same place," they will ignore what advocates and some Congressmen are saying against the strategy and the United States will be able to assume a greater role.

Participants in Prime Minister Meles Meeting:

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¶13. (U) General J, Scott Gration, U.S. special Envoy to Sudan  
Cameron Hudson, Director of Operations, Office of the U.S.  
Special Envoy to Sudan  
Miriam Estrin, Special Assistant to the Special Envoy, Office  
of the U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan  
Charge D'Affaires, Ambassador John M. Yates  
Kathryn Pongonis, Deputy Political/Economic Counselor, U.S.  
Embassy Addis Ababa, Control Officer

¶14. (U) SE Gration's Office has cleared on this cable.  
YATES